

To Pay or not to Pay?

If you've ever met or know any true Division I athletes – any of them – soccer, water polo, golf, football, etc. etc. What most of them get is really quite remarkable.

Full Paid Tuition, Room and Board (including all meals), athletic attire (clothing to wear to class and social events, etc.) and some small stipend as spending money. In effect they are going to college for free. What's the cost of that – I'd estimate somewhere between \$40,000 and \$80,000 per year per athlete. Not a small price. And that's for every scholarship athlete. If you're at a big school with a lot of athletic programs the price tag to cover those expenses has to be extraordinary.

College. What's its purpose? – for 95% of all students is the opportunity to learn and begin to develop a particular expertise in a particular field. College is usually a good investment, but more and more, especially in an economy that is flush with job opportunities and pay that easily competes with the wages a college grad can earn, the appeal to a college education is waning. The average cost of a college education at a state school is somewhere around 150,000 for four years – add another 50% for a private college – and at the tier one elite schools you can double that cost.

So now there is a push to pay college athletes for participating in college sports. The landscape will dramatically change if that occurs. Why? Do the math. Say the cost of a one year fully paid scholarship (tuition, room and board, etc.) is \$50,000. If you allot that for each athlete and now they have to pay for their own tuition, their own room and board, and require them to pay for everything else that the college already pays for them do you really think the students are going to do that? Give an 18 year old \$50,000 and see what happens.

Now some states are pushing to implement this new pay to play philosophy on colleges and universities. I believe it's a mistake.

These athletes will quickly join the ranks of the professional athletes who will acquire personal agents who will be trying to negotiate deals for their clients to get whatever they can from their school or from multiple schools. The cut rate will sky rocket, as those athletes who do not perform will only last a season or two, and the opportunity to acquire their college education, the true reason most of those athletes are in school, will be eliminated.

Ask any parent who has been fortunate enough to have their child enter one of our esteemed military academies. Those schools are also fully paid for by their universities – actually our government. Fortunately they are preparing our future military leaders with a level of discipline and training that will ensure our long term protection. But the commitment is a minimum of six years after graduation. Thus they'll pay for your education, but you must commit to six years of military service after in return. It's a struggle that many potential cadets and their parents worry about as their commitment is significantly different than the one made by an athlete and where they might go after graduation.

According to Statistica, there are about 1 million athletes that participate in high school football in the United States each year. There are 130 (estimate) Division I College Football programs in this country. They average about 85 scholarship athletes per program and they add about 25 per year as 25 leave or graduate. That's about 11,000 athletes – IN JUST THIS ONE SPORT. This does not include the scholarships in any of the Division II schools. There are 7 rounds in the NFL Draft each year where 254 athletes are chosen. Knowing that there is about a 2.3% chance that you're going to the NFL wouldn't most of us be very grateful that their educations were paid for in return for their full participation in the sport?

Should college athletes be paid for participation in a sport – 97% of them already are – it's called an education with room and board as a tremendous perk. Ask the millions of parents who are paying a significant portion, if not all of their kids' college education expenses. The reality is that any student who is fortunate enough to have the dedication and discipline to perform well in high school academically, and that they attend a high school that has a college preparatory track or focus, those students can acquire a significant amount of scholarship opportunity. Perhaps not full ride, but ask any parent who was fortunate enough to have their kids get college scholarships. That academic focus continues to be statistically a much greater investment than any sport. Just ask my wife and I. All four of our kids played sports

throughout their developmental years and all the way through high school. But, we put academics first. That discipline and commitment has allowed each of them to launch very successful careers, through significant scholarships offered by their respective schools. It wasn't easy. The reward was worth it.

I wish you well,

Dave